Five Philosophies of My Life

PHILOSOPHY

Some philosophies that summarize the principles I want to live my life by.

AUTHOR
Rohit Farmer

PUBLISHED
January 31, 2022

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Note: published initially at https://rohitfarmer.medium.com/five-philosophies-of-my-life-7fd018d75a0c

Making everyday decisions is likely most tiring than my scientific research itself. Therefore, following some philosophies that summarize the principles you want to live your life with help automatically make those decisions. At the onset, I want to clarify that our philosophical principles should make us free and not bind us to unchangeable dogmas. We may need to keep them updated with our surroundings and personal maturity. I am not including my religious view to resonate with audiences who do not share. My approach here is to put out practical ideas with or without allegiance to organized religion. Also, it is possible that what I am presenting here is highly influenced by my current stage in life. When writing this article

(January 2022), I am a 37 years old Indian married male living with my wife and two daughters in the United States of America. I am working as a computational biologist in an elite government agency.

Below are the five ideas that I try to follow in my day-to-day life, not in any order of importance. In addition, to my thoughts, I have referenced articles that help shape my opinions.

1. What, not why.

Often we get stuck with why adversity happened rather than thinking about what can be done to address it. Yes, it's natural to ponder and analyze an unwelcome event in our lives. However, the pondering often goes on too long without closure or a positive outcome. Studying and contemplating a troubling situation is fruitful if we learn a lesson we want to avoid in the future. Otherwise, going in circles neither leads to actionable insights nor comforts the suffering.

I agree some emotional and physical scars do not heal quickly, if at all, and we have to learn to live with them. However, most of our everyday problems have a practical solution available right around the corner. All it needs is shifting our mindset of getting stuck on why something is happening to us to what we can do to change it in our favor.

Shifting from asking why to what moves us from a victim mindset to a person in charge of solving a problem. We can then develop actionable insight to resolve our conflicts, lower our emotional or physical suffering, and move on with our lives. Actionable insights also lead to visible results. For example, asking, "Why can't I lose weight?" ask yourself, "What is holding me back from losing weight?" or "What practical changes can I bring in my lifestyle to help me lose weight." Of course, asking why can help you figure out the underlying issues, for example, a metabolic disorder or lifestyle, but just knowing why will not lead you anywhere unless you ask what to do about it.

To know more about where I am coming from, read this article "The One Question NOT to Ask for Healthy Introspection (And What to Ask Instead)" from Art of Manliness.

2. Live like a navigation system.

I love driving, and in the United States, I do not think I can go far without my navigation system. I love it because it's endlessly patient and repeatedly finds ways to overcome failure. For example, when I miss an exit, it never shouts at me but presents me with the next best route. This line of thinking stems from my previous thought that we should think about what we can do to find the next best course to reach our destination instead of getting bogged down with why we missed an exit.

I have seen people in my life who, after facing a setback in their initial plan, either quit the course entirely or struggle to snap out of the hurdle. One common thread I see is that initial plans are usually grandeur and require a high level of precision and discipline, which most of us lack. And when we face a setback, it's hard for us to accept that we were just not ready to embark on such an ambitious journey. What is more saddening is that we often lose sight of our ultimate goal and get trapped in ruminating trivial details of our failures. We need to tone down our expectations and re-sketch a more practical and realistic plan.

So, next time you plan to start the gym, then please be realistic, do not ask yourself to wake up at 5:00 am and go to the gym for 1 hour when you usually get up at 8:00 am and do not exercise at all. It may work for a day or two, and then most likely, you will feel guilty for not keeping up the routine and quit. Instead, be realistic and humbly approach your gym routine. If it took years for you to get out of shape, it would not take a few gym sessions. It is going to be a long journey with multiple failures and setbacks. The key is not to despair and stop but keep adjusting your plan until you get where you want to be.

3. Discipline above motivation.

Have you ever wondered why soldiers are taught discipline and not motivation? Because one day, a soldier may say that he is not feeling motivated enough to fight the war, and we all will be doomed. That is probably why this one is my favorite because it translates into results no matter the circumstances. Motivation is based on feelings that may fluctuate for reasons as simple as the change in weather. However, disciplined action is not affected by the nuisances of our everyday lives. That is why if a goal is vital for me, I do not leave it at the mercy of motivation. Instead, I make sure that I have sketched a disciplined course of action to achieve it.

This doesn't need to be applied only to glorifying feats but as mundane as putting dishes to wash every day. I used to hate it, but I hated the messy kitchen sink and counter space more. So I made it a part of my disciplined nighttime routine. Before I call it a day, I mechanically run the dishwasher. I still hate doing it on some days, but now that my muscles have memorized it and I have carved a time slot for it, it just happens.

As another example, I also have a disciplined effort to read a minimum of half an hour every day before starting work and going to bed. I read technical stuff related to my scientific research in the morning, and I read for leisure at night. This practice is harder to keep up with as a morning email can entirely change the course of my day, or kids are not as supportive going to bed, but I keep on coming back to it.

4. Reduce, reuse, recycle.

I am sure that everyone is aware of this phrase. But, unfortunately, it is much easier said than done. The original intent of this mantra is to reduce human impact on the environment. However, for me, it serves multiple purposes. Yes, first, I want to reduce my impact on the environment. Therefore, I try to reduce producing trash that goes to landfills; I try to reuse stuff as long as I can and recycle either through standard recycling or repurposing to substitute something that I need to buy. However, in addition to environmental impact, I also follow this rule to save money, be more creative, and be ready to dispose of many of my possessions at a moment's notice (I will explain it later).

It is obvious to reduce trash, try not to buy stuff first, and lead a minimalist or mediumalist (more balanced) lifestyle that minimizes the garbage we produce and the amount of money we spend. Of course, the latter may not necessarily be true because you can own very few but costly things. But in general, it should correlate very well. I try not to buy a lot, mainly things I don't need. Don't get me wrong, I do spend substantially on quality food, health and fitness, and general comforts of life. But I don't satisfy cultural norms or follow the latest fashion or social fads (I don't own an iPhone).

Reusing and recycling means re-purposing my stuff and using hand-me-downs if an item is still useable. When I re-purpose an item, it allows me to exercise the creative side of my brain. It makes me think out of the box and develop cool ideas. Sure, that could simply mean using cookie tin cans to replace plastic (bad for the environment) storage boxes and pasta sauce bottles for spices (we are Indians; we have lots of spices). But continuous practice can lead to substantial differences in the long run. Also, whenever I repurpose an item, I try to invest the amount of money I saved by avoiding buying it new.

It's easier now than ever to get used items for cheap or free either through the Facebook marketplace or projects like "Buy Nothing." The buy nothing project encourages you to join your local buy nothing chapter on Facebook and giveaway or ask for items for free. Apart from reducing trash, one of the project's aims is to foster relationships among the residents of a local area.

Ever since we moved to the USA on a visa, we realized spending money on newer things is probably not wise. So, we started buying everything used or free from the buy nothing group. As a result, today, even if we get 12 hours' notice to leave the country, we can throw away everything without losing money. I did buy a new car, but that is a story for another blog post.

5. Leave no trace.

Similar to my rule number 4, leaving no trace stems from the idea of reducing our impact on the environment. It is highly practiced among campers and outdoor enthusiasts. It simply means when you do an outdoor activity, leave the area as you found it and bring back every man-made thing (trash) with you. I also try to practice it in my indoor life — especially in my

office and kitchen — tidy up behind you. I like the idea of tidying up my office when I leave so that I can find it fresh and uncluttered the following day. I also try to run the dishwasher and clear the counter space every night to make my breakfast easily the next morning while I am still getting out of my slumber.

Since I practice it, I also try to enforce it on my family and teach my kids to clean up their toys — with some success.

Thank you for reading until the end. I hope some of the ideas mentioned here may have inspired you.

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